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## DISCUSSION.

ISAAC A. LOOS: The paper just read is an argument for the economic interpretation of history, regarded as an important aspect of the interpretation of history; it is an argument for reckoning with economic conditions in the interpretation of history. To this cautious and moderate defense of the economic interpretation of history there can be but little opposition.

The first objection I have to urge, in addition to those considered in the paper, to the phrase as it stands and understood in the sweeping sense commonly attached to it, is its one-sidedness. This objection corresponds somewhat closely to the fifth objection considered in the paper. The phrase as it stands and is commonly understood announces its exponent as the defender of a school, an "ism," an exaggeration. It implies that the economic interpretation is final, complete, and all sufficient, and that there is no other aspect to the explanation of history. This large claim Professor Seligman regards as unnecessary, or as necessary only in dealing with the genesis of social institutions. He admits in his answer to what he calls the fourth objection (that the theory of economic interpretation neglects the ethical and spiritual forces of history) that we must regard, for example, the moral sense, once developed as leading an existence by itself. If so, we must reckon with it, once it is developed, as an independent and self-existent factor in the interpretation of existing human life. The same thing must be said respecting intellect and will. When these are once developed, they lead an independent existence and constitute a superorganic or psychical factor as dis-

tinguished from the purely physical or the biological factors. The words economic and economics can be so used, indeed, they are very often so used, as to include all these elements separately considered, but at the cost of clear thinking, and even more to the detriment of clear expression.

There is a second objection to the phrase "the economic interpretation of history," namely, its ambiguity, its lack of precision. The word "economic" has too much to do for scientific precision ; it must stand now for subjective utility or rational selection, now for objective utility taking on the double aspect of natural selection under the influence of the pressure of environment on food supply and the food quest or the more direct and simple impact of climatic and geographical conditions. It will make immensely for clearness, therefore, if we speak of these factors as psychical, biological, and material or physical respectively. We can then adjourn the question whether the last be the ultimate ground of the others, and move forward in our attention to the evolution of the sociological factors. I should say then that as a cult or as the watchword of a school the economic interpretation of history is open to a third objection, in addition to the two noted above and in addition to those reviewed in the paper. It is likely to take the student of history and of the social sciences from the sphere of his proper inquiry concerning the course and meaning of history into the sphere of metaphysics. It is better to come to the problem of ultimate origins through the study of philosophy.

In the fourth place I desire to ask whether history be not itself interpretation. To this question the several schools of history may give varying answers, and I leave it to the historians who take part in this discussion to

furnish their own answers. Even if we define history as a record of events, have we dismissed our difficulty?

What now can we say constructively? In the first place it must be regretted that the social sciences have suffered and still do suffer seriously from an interminable war of words. For the most part those who defend the so-called "economic interpretation of history" investigate some of the same problems, and they investigate these problems by the same method as those students who are now calling themselves sociologists. Professor Keasbey, for example, under the title of "economic geography," has sketched his conception of the development of human society under the influence of economic motives.<sup>1</sup> He has taken the sociologists to task for giving insufficient attention to economic environment and for giving excessive emphasis to will or purpose where will and purpose do not exist. This is equivalent to saying that the sociologists are not doing their work efficiently when dealing with the genesis of society, or that they have not done their work finally.

It may be admitted, secondly, that we can get along without the word "sociology" if its work be done under other names by essentially the same methods and the same instrumentalities. But how the economists themselves can get away from their own terminology and from the large literature which has been wrought out by them in the past several hundred years is itself a serious problem. But it is a problem with which they are struggling successfully by swelling the ranks of the historians and doing some work, indeed much work, hitherto left undone by the historians. And yet we may ask

<sup>1</sup> Keasbey. The institution of society, *The International Monthly*, April, 1900; and two papers on Economic geography, in the *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 16, nos. 1 and 3.

is it possible, and if possible is it advisable after the terms economic and economics have developed such definite connotation (the word "economy" is open to freer construction) to designate an altogether new set of problems and to give an altogether new direction to the problems worked out by the older economists. Apart from the word "utility" there is no point of connection with the regular school; and utility serves only as a verbal bond, for the concepts attached to the word by the regular school of economists, the earlier and later classical, are primarily metaphysical, or psychical as the later classicists would prefer to say, while the historical or sociological school of economists deal with objective utility on a non-animistic or utilitarian basis.

The German historical school has made a place for the broader problems of the origin and relativity of economic forces and principles in their *Allgemeine Volkswirtschaftslehre*. But even in Germany the word "sociology" is making its way. Professor Simmel is giving a course of lectures in Berlin under the title *Sociologie*. By the side of the historical school or as embraced within it I would place the scientific socialists or the socialist school of economists, and the positive philosophy with its chapters on social physics, as forerunners of the larger and more general social science now commonly described as sociology, developed on the lines of the natural sciences. The recognition, in the paper just read, of the work of the scientific socialists, and of Karl Marx in particular, deserves further emphasis. Much can be said to show that the predecessors of Marx, (Godwin, Thompson, Saint Simon) were in search of a broader basis for the theory of society than either the Smithian or the Ricardian economics postulated. Add to the Marxian analysis of history the doc-

trine of liberty, and you have in socialism a political philosophy. Socialism need not necessarily be viewed and is not always viewed as a body of economic doctrine ; it may also be regarded as a theory of society.

The historical economists and the socialists have been preparing the way for the science of sociology, but the problems stated by them must find their final solution in the larger treatment of society accorded to these problems by the sociologists.

The development of the science of sociology with its appropriate method cannot be ascribed exclusively to the evolution of the positive philosophy under the guiding genius of August Comte, as is so often done, except as that is merged with other currents of thought tending toward the same end, above all the naturalistic which took shape in the development of the natural sciences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries giving us Lamarck and Darwin, and the revival of historical inquiry on empirical and Aristotelian lines giving us Savigny and Maine in jurisprudence and the study of institutions, and Roscher, Knies and Hildebrand in the historical school of economics, and Saint Simon, Rodbertus, Marx, and Lassalle in the socialist school of economics, and Ruskin in the art movement. The philosopher Hegel may from some points of view be regarded as the connecting link between the old metaphysics and the new sciences ; his contemporary Goethe is an expression of it. Hegel's doctrine of development had as profound an influence on the German founders of historical criticism and scientific socialism as Malthus's theory of the pressure of population on food supply had on the Darwinian theory of natural selection which has played such an immense role in speculative biology. The importance of the sociologists, considered as research

students and as a school of thinkers, lies in their clear and frank recognition that all things are tied together at common points, that the universe must be reckoned as a cosmos, and that its evolution can be traced in a serial order of the sciences.

Professor Seligman in the closing paragraph of his paper treats the sociologists with great respect, but he puts them away up in the clouds ; and he seems to expect something from them by and by. We shall probably have to wait for some time for anything approaching final results from the work of the sociologists ; but it is worth while to concede to them the right of way to deal at first hand with the general problems of social origins, functions, organization and methods of amelioration. Giving attention to the last phase of the problems of society does not read them out of the list of the scientists, any more than engineers are read out by building bridges and sewers. The sociologists are the general interpreters of history ; the economists, publicists, politicists, jurists, writers on ethics, and the critics of literature and the arts are its special interpreters. But the interpretation of history is not the entire work of the social scientists. They must address themselves even primarily to the current problems of the life now existing. This they must do in the light of history but not with sole reference to history as a source of light. The social sciences look to the present as well as to the past ; and in a measure also to the future. All sciences do. Prediction, not prophecy, is the test of applied sciences. The economic interpreters of history are co-workers with the sociologists ; they are keeping the attention of the sociologist to a consideration of the influence of environment and of resources, yet the sociologists are not limited to a consideration of one factor in

progress. It is their business to reckon with all the factors, the spiritual and moral forces as well as the material or physical. But the cardinal importance of the last must never be forgotten.

EDWARD P. CHEYNEY: The economic interpretation or explanation of history as usually practiced is an effort to find some economic factor in each series of historical events that will explain them,—tell why they occurred. There are two objections to this practice so serious as to call for its condemnation by historians. The first of these objections is one of method, a theoretical objection. The economic interpretation of history arbitrarily and unjustifiably places one group of historical phenomena in a position fundamental to the others, before investigating all the facts to see whether they should really be so placed.

The mere historian, the plain scientific student of the past, when he enters upon the investigation of any period or aspect of history has a two-fold task before him; first to find out all the facts, and secondly to arrange these facts according to their own nature, to put those together which prove to belong together. That is to say he must go where his facts take him, he must follow his facts not lead them. If they group themselves in such a way as to explain the series of occurrences, so much the better; but he must not impose an explanation upon them. If it should prove in any case that the economic phenomena are the ones that explain the others, well and good, but it may also prove that it is the legal phenomena, or the political or the moral, or the facts of language. The historian has no way of telling what the explanation is beforehand. He must wait till he has arranged his facts and then see which are those that interpret the others. That is to say his method is objective, inductive,



impersonal, *a posteriori*. He knows of no interpretation of history except that which history gives of itself.

The economic interpretation of history, on the other hand, as usually understood and applied, seeks first of all for some economic phenomenon or condition which may explain or interpret the events under consideration. When found this is accepted, approved and utilized for purposes of explanation, *because* it is economic in character. That is to say the method is subjective, arbitrary, *a priori*. For instance, suppose one is confronted by the historical problem of the growth of two separate nationalities in the Iberian peninsula, Spain and Portugal. The historian would proceed to gather all the facts bearing on the history of those two countries, arrange these, and strive to discover from them what are the reasons for the separateness of the two states. An advocate of the economic interpretation of history was struck by the fact that the amount and character of the rainfall of the two countries is quite different, seized upon this as being an adequate explanation, and has advanced it as the solution of the problem, because it is an economic explanation. He may or may not be right, but the method by which he has reached his result is evidently quite different from that of the historian.

Another instance may be found in Professor Thorold Rogers's effort to explain the causes of the Peasant's Revolt of 1381. He was so convinced that the cause for the outbreak was economic in its nature that he seized upon the only fact of that kind which suggested itself to him as adequate, and attributed the revolt to the reintroduction by the landlords of the old labor services. When the matter was properly and historically investigated it was found that no such process had taken place

and Professor Rogers's generalization in this as in so many other points has been entirely discredited. He approached an historical question in the spirit of an economist and failed accordingly.

We need go no further back than Professor Seligman's paper read this evening to find an instance of the difference in the two methods. He declares that the task of the interpretation of history is the discovery of the reason for human progress. But the historian does not feel himself to be especially interested in investigating the condition of progress. He is engaged simply in studying the history of the past. Sometimes it is progress, sometimes it is decadence ; more often it is a condition of things in which some phenomena are those of progress, others those of decay ; most often of all it is a condition of things where the question whether the tendencies of the time are those of progress or decay, is purely a question of modern, individual opinion.

No, the two methods are irreconcilable. The scientific historian cannot adopt the economic interpretation of history, because it seems to him fallacious and unscientific, and therefore unjustifiable.

Secondly, there is a practical objection to this process. The time is not ripe for the economic or any other interpretation of history. There is too much to be done in finding out what actually has been to spend time in seeking for its explanation. There are great masses of manuscript material lying unprinted and, therefore, unavailable ; there are enormous collections of source material for the study of history printed by governments and associations, and readily accessible, but unanalyzed and unutilized ; there are vast numbers of monographs and special studies of individual points which have not yet been worked up into the body of systematized historical

knowledge. Whole subjects are still obscure to the last degree. Institutions which have lasted through centuries and affected the great majority of the people, we are still ignorant about, not only in their minute points, but in their very fundamentals. Mediæval serfdom is an institution which has been much dealt with by economists, and yet we have scarcely made a beginning of its study. The scholars who have been at work patiently investigating its phenomena have one after another borne testimony to the inadequacy and preliminary character of their labors. What do we know of the ordinary normal working of the greatest of all mediæval institutions, the church? We have studied it from a polemic point of view, either of criticism or defense, almost entirely. The great part it played in ordinary life during those centuries in which it was the strongest and most active and most enlightened institution in all society is still a sealed book to us. There are many aspects of the Reformation, and even of the French revolution, which have never yet been investigated. There are whole periods, as for instance the fifteenth century, which lies too late for the mediævalist and too early for the student of modern history, which are all but unknown. Historians have only just lately turned from an almost exclusive study of individuals to the study of institutions. They are only gradually extending their study so as to include not only political, legal, and ecclesiastical, but social and economic and many other kinds of facts as well.

History is so vast, varied, uncertain and difficult a field that it is no wonder that historians feel that the work lying to their hands is its investigation rather than its interpretation. What they want above all to do is to

reduce this chaotic world of the past to some kind of order.

No student of history can do much reading in the works of those who profess to give its economic interpretation without being half amused, half saddened at the kind of history they are trying to interpret. It is so vague, so mistaken, so filled with discredited and fanciful notions that if it were successfully interpreted it would be an interpretation not of the real history of the world but of some quite suppositious history. This, however, is the fault of the historians. They have not yet got their material into a shape in which it can be safely and profitably put into the hands of another group of scientists as raw material upon which to work.

The study of history now is like this continent was when our ancestors first came to it. Its forests needed to be cut off, its rivers bridged, its mines opened, its distances diminished by roads, railroads and canals. The world of history likewise is not yet ready for its highest uses. There must be much done in the way of explanation, of cultivation, of familiarization, before we can reduce it all to law.

Therefore, for this second reason, the historian must oppose the habit of devoting time and effort to the economic interpretation of history. It is not the work which needs now to be done. However pleasant it would be to be the contemporaries of our great-grandchildren and join with them in the work of interpreting the history of the past, it is quite evidently our duty to devote our labor to preparing the material for their hands.